

Steal This Hook! "Let's Make a Deal"

By Robert Wiese



"You wash my back, I'll wash yours." It's very cliché, but also very true. Bad guys, especially, like to form alliances to accomplish common or related goals. These are usually short-term alliances, or they may be merely economic arrangements, but they bolster both sides because each can throw the other group against pesky adventurers. This month, consider these hooks that involve different groups either forming alliances or offering their services for such an alliance.



"Dragon Turtle, for Barter Only" -- Eberron

In the far east of Khorvaire, the Lhazaar princes control the seas. Their ships patrol the waters, fighting independent pirates (for all Lhazaar princes descend somehow from pirates, either biologically or ideologically) and protecting their lands from incursions. However, groups in the Lhazaar islands seek to overthrow one or another prince. Sometimes these forces can be traced to other princes, sometimes to humanoids from Q'Barra or Valenar, and sometimes to independent pirates and smugglers that find the current status quo not favorable.

The PCs are on a ship traveling somewhere in the southern Lhazaar Principalities when they see a strange sight. Several dragon turtles approach the ship. Since dragon turtles are dragons, the captain does not want to initiate hostilities, and his delay is very costly. The dragon turtles ram the ship, and dozens of lizardfolk warriors stream from hidden places in the shells and board the ship. The PCs are quickly fighting for their lives!

Should they survive, the ship probably won't. Once they have figured out rescue, the owners of the ship contact them and ask them to do something about the lizardfolk mercenaries. They have attacked other ships while the PCs were busy rescuing themselves.

d100 Motivations

00-45 The ship owner, part of a faction in the Lhazaar Principalities, is sincere in wanting the lizardfolk stopped. He doesn't know anything besides the names of the captains of the other ships attacked and that these captains all belonged to part of the same faction.

Campaign Adaptation

Bring this hook into your campaign. The [Forgotten Realms](#) product [Serpent Kingdoms](#) details the lives of lizardfolk in good detail. You might want to use blackscale or poison dusk lizardfolk from [Monster Manual III](#) instead of the standard variety. And [Stormwrack](#) should help with the sea-going parts of the adventure.

Forgotten Realms: You could put this adventure in and around the Shining Sea, with the lizardfolk coming from the Jungles of Chult.

Generic: A coastal area with several communities that could be at odds is what you need. It should have a place somewhere close where lizardfolk would live, but close is relative.

46-75 The lizardfolk were not supposed to attack the ship, since the ship's owner is the one paying the lizardfolk to attack others. He has decided they are unreliable and wants the PCs to eliminate them (and thus destroy evidence of his activities).

76-90 A rival of the ship owner, possibly the prince, contacts the PCs too. This person wants the PCs to go against the ship owner and negotiate a pact with the lizardfolk.

91-00 The lizardfolk are looking long-term, and they want to overthrow a Lhazaar prince and claim his lands for their own. The current tactics are the beginnings of a years-long plot.

d100 Complications

00-65 A large tribe of lizardfolk from Q'Barra sees an opportunity in the endless conflicts, and they domesticated some dragon turtles that live in the seas near their homelands. They sell their services to any who can pay, and they are currently working for an independent pirate group that wants to cause chaos in the southern Principalities.

66-75 The tamed dragon turtles have infected wild ones with the desire to attack ships, and additional ships are being attacked by dragon turtles alone. Sorting out which ships are victims of the lizardfolk could be problematic.

76-85 Two Lhazaar princes have both paid the lizardfolk, which results in the lizardfolk working against both princes (something they have no problem with).

86-00 The real power behind the lizardfolk is a pirate who is wanted for many crimes and would be killed if apprehended. This pirate is taking revenge on the princes, and she uses the lizardfolk as one means to that end.

Greyhawk: This adventure works in the Sea of Gearnat and Relmor Bay, with the lizardfolk coming down from the Gnatmarsh.

Modern: Dragon turtles are pretty rare in the modern world, but you could give the lizardfolk submarines that look like dragon turtles. Place the adventure off the coast of Japan and Australia, or near Seattle.

Ravenloft: The dragon turtles become skeletal dragon turtles or even dragon turtle dracoliches, and the lizardfolk could be mummified or vampiric. Set the adventure along the coast of Lamordia or Dementlieu (though I favor Lamordia).



Barge Hags -- *Forgotten Realms*

The river Delimbiyr runs from the Nether Mountains south and west past the High Forest, the High Moor, and Daggerford to reach the Sword Coast. Though the Shining Falls near Loudwater prevent the whole length of it from being navigable, it is navigable from Loudwater to the coast and from above the falls to the headwaters. Thus, there is a lot of trade on the water, especially from Loudwater to the sea. River transport of goods is preferable from Loudwater, both because it's less expensive and because bandits haunt the road. However, the river has its share of dangers. Barge pirates operate from time to time below Loudwater, where they can hide in the High Moor between raids. Barge pirates are not usually a big problem; they strike once or twice and then disappear for some reason.

Then, reports come in to Secomber and Loudwater of a new group of pirates that don't steal goods. Instead, they blockade the river and demand tolls to pass. As the days pass, both towns send out forces to eliminate these pirates, but these pirates seem to have magic (or luck, or good planning) on their side because the weather is always in their favor. Some are captured or killed, but the group is not stopped and barge/boat captains pay the tolls to move their vessels.

In Secomber, a merchant named Sultai Orero has suffered too much loss to these new barge pirates, and she wants something done about it. Since the pirates are somehow evading the authorities on a regular basis, she thinks the authorities are not to be trusted and turns to adventurers. She is willing to offer a handsome reward -- and even a partnership with PCs who have a business inclination.

d100 Motivations

00-55 Sultai is genuinely concerned about her business and is up front with the PCs.

56-80 Sultai is not hiring the PCs at all. One of the hags (see below) impersonates her via magic and hires the PCs. The hags want to be rid of their "partners" and think this is the best way of severing the relationship.

81-00 Sultai wants revenge. She tried to make a deal with the pirates, but they refused, so she wants them eliminated. Her business is of secondary concern.

d100 Complications

00-30 The barge pirates don't have a wizard among them. They have made a deal with a hag covey that lives in the High Moor, and the hags provide weather control support, along with other spell support and even physical intervention, in exchange for half the proceeds. The hags use the money for some project that is not related to the barge pirates, and would find other ways of stealing the money if the barge pirates are eliminated.

31-50 The hags are not real. Instead, they are the creation of a group of evil fey that lives in the High Moor. By this subterfuge, the fey protect themselves from discovery should the pirates be

Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for other campaign worlds. [Complete Scoundrel](#) and [Complete Adventurer](#) might be useful in rounding out the pirates. [Stormwrack](#) might help with the waterborne part of the adventure.

Eberron: This adventure would work well on the river border between Thrane and Karrnath, just north of Thronehold. If that's a little too close to civilization for you, move north to the border between Aundair and Karrnath.

Generic: A waterway that is used for trade is the main requirement. You don't even need a swamp nearby, since you can have the hags living almost anywhere.

Greyhawk: The area north of Greyhawk City works well, as does the river that runs between Verbobonc and Dyvers.

Modern: Not all three kinds of hags appear in the modern world unless they are shadow creatures brought from somewhere else. But you can replace them with fey or medusa spellcasters. This adventure could be interesting along the Mississippi, but also along the Yangtze or the Nile or the Amazon.

captured.

51-75 A rival of Sultai's is taking advantage of the situation and having his captains pay the pirates to charge Sultai's vessels (or those carrying her cargoes) more. This rival hopes to drive her out of business without being personally involved.

Ravenloft: The Musarde River in Richemulot is a good place for this adventure. It connects all the settlements of the domain, and the people in charge are all merchants.

76-00 Vessels that pay the pirates are still being attacked and destroyed from time to time. The hags use illusions, undead, and even river creatures to destroy boats that have cargoes they want.

My Bugbear, My Friend -- *Eberron*

In Zilargo, near the Seawall Mountains, a lot of people move from place to place. A lightning rail line passes through the area, and House Orien trade roads connect the major gnomish settlements. In this area, from time to time, bandits operate. The trade caravans are well guarded, so travelers become the prime targets. One group of gnome bandits, called the Bloody Hawks, robs travelers throughout the region between Zolanberg and Korranberg. They usually rob on the trade roads, but they have hit the lightning rail line more than once. They never kill; always masked, they take valuables and leave their group's symbol behind.



A week ago, a group of traveling merchants was slaughtered on the road between Tarandro and Thurimbar, and all their possessions taken. A Bloody Hawks sign was left at the scene. This caused the regional law enforcement agencies, who usually did not take much interest in the doings of the Bloody Hawks, to become more interested and to try to seek them out. Two days ago, another attack occurred, this time outside Zolanberg. There was one survivor, and he saw bugbears and gnomes working together to slaughter everyone else. Again, a Bloody Hawks sign was left at the scene.

The PCs are in one of the towns in the region when they hear that Captain Osamonish of the guards seeks adventurers. Captain Osamonish relates that he lost his entire company to the bugbear and gnome bandits, and he needs help to track and eliminate them. He offers standard pay, but says that the bandits no doubt have a lot of loot, and if some of that was not returned it could be explained away easily.

d100 Motivations

00-45 Captain Osamonish is sincere; he lost his company and wants a victory so their lives were not given in vain.

46-55 Captain Osamonish tried to make a deal with the bandits to cut the watch company in for a percentage, but the bugbears among the bandits wanted no more allies and attacked. Now the captain wants revenge.

56-80 As an alternative, the PCs are traveling the road when they are attacked by an overwhelming force of bandits and left for dead. A bugbear from a different tribe brings them back and gives them information that puts them on the track of the bandits (to get their stuff back, among other reasons).

81-00 The Bloody Hawks are not working with the bugbears (or aren't any more, depending on the complication below). The bugbears are using the sign to divert blame away from themselves. The Bloody Hawks want the bugbears stopped (to clear their reputations) and so they hire the PCs.

d100 Complications

00-40 The Bloody Hawks allied with a tribe of bugbears from the Seawall Mountains for mutual profit (or to keep themselves from being killed by the bugbears). The bugbears are doing the murders, which have the gnomes worried.

41-50 The bugbears are merely using the sign of the Bloody Hawks to divert suspicion onto someone else for their raids. The bugbears are led by a gnome sorcerer or maybe a necromancer.

51-65 The third caravan (the next one) is attacked by owlbears instead of bandits. The clues don't match up at all, and the PCs have to figure out what is going on.

66-90 Some of the bodies from the attack sites were stolen, including most of the lost company of guards. The lost patrol returns as zombies or ghouls and attacks the next caravan with the Hawks. Other bodies appear later on, or they appear guarding a base that the bugbears and/or Hawks are using.

91-00 The lost company of guards is the Bloody Hawks. They were using their official status to commit the robberies. They ran afoul of the bugbears when they tried to stop the use of their sign.

Campaign Adaptation

This hook drops easily into other campaign worlds. Here are some suggestions. Use [Savage Species](#) to make interesting types of bugbears (feral, insectile, reptilian, multiheaded, and even yuan-ti crossbreed variants). *Complete Scoundrel* could have a lot to help you flesh out the bandits.

Forgotten Realms: The Dalelands are a good place for this adventure, with bugbears living in the Thunder Peaks or the forest of Cormanthor.

Generic: All you need for this is a city or town and a road that goes somewhere else that people use frequently. Some wilderness where bandits can hide is also helpful.

Greyhawk: This adventure works in the Duchy of Urnst, or even the County. There are a lot of merchants and people going here and there, and a kind of city-state mentality.

Modern: Put the bugbears in SUVs or on motorcycles and you have something reminiscent of *Mad Max* (or maybe *The Road Warrior*). Set the adventure in Australia, where the frontier is not far away but there are towns.

Ravenloft: The bandits and bugbears would be desperate characters in the Domain of Dread. You could even make them lycanthropes. Dementlieu and Invidia are good domain choices, though Falkovnia works too.

About the Author

Robert Wiese has been playing **D&D** since 1978 after he watched a game played in the car on the way home from a Boy Scouts meeting. He was fascinated, and delved into this strange world of dragons and magic and sourcebooks. Years later, he was hired to edit tournaments for the **RPGA** Network, and from there progressed to running the network after his boss was assassinated in the great Christmas purge of 1996. Times were tough, but he persevered and brought the **RPGA** into a shining new era. Eventually he met a girl who liked to play **D&D**

too, and he left Renton for the warmth and casinos of Reno, Nevada. Now, he works in the Pharmacology department of UNR studying mouse foot muscles and the effects of RF emissions on same. He spends as much time as possible with his wife Rhonda and year-old son Owen.

Over the course of his career, he wrote over sixty tournament adventures for the **RPGA** , and he continues to inflict his creativity on you through this website. He hopes that you find his little creations useful, or at least amusing.

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